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AUTHOR Adams, Scott
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ABSTRACT

Scholars can learn much from analyzing discourse within a statewide political debate. A study used W. R. Fisher's theory of narrative rationality to analyze the first intra-party debate (April 16, 1990) between Republican candidates for Governor of Arkansas, Sheffield Nelson and Tommy Robinson, to ascertain the narrative rationality employed by each and the roles portrayed by each. A detailed examination of the question, answers, and closing statements of the debate, using R. P. Hart's method of role analysis, revealed that of Nelson's 188 statements referring to himself, the largest number fell into the category of performative action, followed by narrative action, then behavioral action and lastly emotional/moral action. Results further showed that of Robinson's 92 self-references, the largest number were in the category of narrative action, followed by performative action, then emotional/moral action, with behavioral action as the smallest category. Findings suggest that Nelson was able to play the successful chief executive officer, and by concentrating his self references in the behavioral category, was able to provide Arkansas voters a consistent picture of his plans for the future of the state. Findings further suggest that Robinson, with the bulk of his statements in the category of narrative action, was not able to promote his vision of the future of the state. (One table is included and 93 references are attached.) (PRA)

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THE ARKANSAS DEBATE OF 1990: A NARRATIVE VIEW OF ROLE

Scott Adams
Department of Communication
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN

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THE ARKANSAS DEBATE OF 1990: A NARRATIVE VIEW OF ROLE

Abstract

This paper uses Fisher's theory of narrative rationality to analyze the first intra-party debate between Republican candidates for the Governor of Arkansas. Very few critics of political communication have examined any level of discourse on any level other than presidential debate. There is much to be learned from analyzing political communication within a statewide debate. A consideration of the narrative rationality enjoyed by both candidates, Sheffield Nelson and Tommy Robinson, and also the roles portrayed by each, will lead to an illumination of our study of debate across the boundaries of contest and genre.

THE ARKANSAS DEBATE OF 1990. A NARRATIVE VIEW OF ROLE

Debates have existed for centuries. Many studies of debate within the field of political communication have focused on presidential debates. The years of 1960 and 1976 come to mind rather quickly as years of primary critical focus. Debates between candidates have become standardized to fit the increasingly media-oriented atmosphere of the society. Although many have studied the contexts and perceptions of debates involving national presidential candidates, much can be learned from the study of candidate debates within other contexts as well.

There are relatively few media environments in today's society which have not experienced modern televised political debate. Before 1990, there has not been a political debate broadcast statewide between candidates from the same party for a constitutional office in a primary election in Arkansas.[1] On April 16, 1990, a debate occurs between Republican gubernatorial candidates Tommy Robinson and Sheffield Nelson is broadcast to a statewide audience. The winner of this debate meets Governor Bill Clinton in the elections, to be held in November of the same year.

In this paper, I argue that there is much to be learned from analyzing discourse within a statewide debate. Presidential debates are certainly still a fertile ground for research, but I feel that the research within the study of political debate should be broadened, and not limited to one aspect which can only be observed every four years. Specifically, I argue that a

consideration of the narrative rationality enjoyed by both candidates, Nelson and Robinson, and also the roles portrayed by each, will lead to an illumination of our study of debate across the boundaries of contest and genre.

Background Of The Candidates

Each candidate has a long personal history in Arkansas. Tommy Robinson came to statewide prominence after being named the director of the Arkansas State Police in 1979. Robinson was a controversial public figure in Central Arkansas, coming to particular fame as the sheriff of Pulaski County, the state's most populous area. Robinson's tenure as sheriff was noteworthy, with many controversies under his reign. As sheriff, Robinson had prisoners chained to the fences of the state penitentiary, arrested the county judge and county clerk, and posted deputy sheriffs in convenience stores with shotguns in an attempt to lower the crime rate of the area. It can be said that Tommy Robinson, as the sheriff of Pulaski County, had a controversial term. In 1985, Robinson was elected to represent the Second Congressional District of Arkansas. Robinson did not have a distinguished term as Congressman; with the one notable exception being in 1989 when Robinson, elected to his seat as a Democrat, switched parties. The change was announced at the White House, with all the pomp and circumstance of a Presidential ceremony.

Sheffield Nelson also had a long history with the people of Arkansas. Nelson arose to statewide prominence on gaining the presidency of Arkla, the state's natural gas utility. Nelson met W.R. "Witt" Stephens of Arkla Gas in 1963. Stephens liked what

he saw, and hired Nelson on his graduation from college. Nelson became president and chief executive officer of Arkla Gas in 1973, and in 1979, he became chairman of the board. Nelson's connections to Arkla would be a major point of controversy throughout the campaign with Robinson. Robinson, in attempting to portray Nelson as a greedy utility chief, tried to portray Nelson as taking money from the ratepayers of the state. Nelson and the storyline he followed had to neutralize a competing storyline followed by Tommy Robinson.

Theoretical Basis

Political debates have been criticized by many authors as not being "real" debates.[2] In this paper, I agree with Brydon (1990) that "debates as presently constituted can be profitably viewed from ... the perspective of narrative rationality" (p. 1-2). The basic judgment of the audience of any debate, Brydon (1990) argues, is "one of character or ethos" (p. 2). Audiences who view debates, whether for the office of President of the United States or for a seat in the House of Representatives, are able to make an accurate judgment about the character of people being observed by judging the narrative rationality of the stories being told to the public. Character, as Fisher (1987) conceives it, "is a generalized perception of person's fundamental value orientation" (p. 148). McGee (1985) states that "(s)uch stories are important because they contextualize political experience, framing public life so that complex problems can be simplified and so understood" (p. 156).

This paper argues that a political debate should not be judged on the basis of its truth to the canons of argumentation.

A debate, no matter what the position contested, can be more effectively judged on the basis of Fisher's idea of narrative rationality. Fisher (1987) explains the concept of narrative rationality as having two major principles: "probability (coherence) and fidelity (truthfulness and reliability)" (p. 47). Probability, whether a story "hangs together," is seen as having three components: (1) argumentative or structural coherence, (2) material coherence, and (3) characterological coherence (Fisher, 1987, p. 47). Narrative fidelity focuses on "the logic of good reasons -- elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice fostered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical" (Fisher, 1987, p. 48). This "logic of good reasons" is demonstrated (in a big way) in political debates. Brydon (1990) argues that "debates have become characterological contests in which the clash of values predominates" (p. 5).

A debate, within this view, is a contest between storytellers who are competing with characters produced during the course of the campaign. The image or the storyline produced by the candidate throughout his or her life in `the public eye' has become very important. McGee (1985) argues that a candidates' "contextualized image... has been more important than the substance of political issues of the moment" (p. 157). The story a candidate projects, whether consciously or unconsciously, and how the candidate stays to that particular theme has distinct results for the campaign. Hart (1990) states that a rhetor using a narrative "disarm(s) listeners by enchanting them," awaken(s)

listeners "dormant experiences and feelings," (p. 133) and expose(s) some sort of propositional argument. This view of debaters as storytellers also leads to another critical tool - the use of role analysis. What are the roles that these storytellers are casting for themselves? Hart (1990) states that the analysis of role highlights the "**locus of action**" (p. 298) within a text. This process "describes whether the speaker is being acted upon by events or whether the speaker is taking charge" (Hart, 1990, p. 298). Hart (1990) claims the references a speaker makes about him/herself "make[s] special claims on listeners' attention" (p. 296) while "index[ing] a person's feelings and ambitions in especially prominent ways" (295). The four categories of self-references and their relevance to both candidates will be examined.

According to Fisher (1987), the **narrative paradigm** is not a model of discourse (p. 90) and that, instead, the paradigm implies a philosophical view of communication. Admittedly, the structure of the narrative paradigm leads one to draw the conclusion that the narrative paradigm in Fisher's earlier articles are meant to construe a model or a form of communication. However, in the same work, Fisher (1987) later states that "(t)he primary function of the paradigm is to offer a critique," (p. 90) and it is in this sense of a general critique that the idea of narrative rationality is used in this paper.

Background Of The Debate

The Arkansas Debate takes place in an auditorium on the campus of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, Arkansas. Fayetteville is located in the northwest corner of Arkansas, in

the most heavily Republican section of the state. The state's Third Congressional District can be counted on to guarantee both candidates of a receptive audience (Blair, 1988, p. 75). The debate was jointly sponsored by the student governments of the University of Arkansas and the Arkansas State University. Each candidate in the debate was given two minutes to answer questions posed by panelists and one minute to answer in rebuttal.

Nelson and Robinson had clashed previously on April 13, 1990. The two candidates appeared jointly on a Little Rock television station, KARK. Originally, this first appearance was scheduled for a fifteen minute section of the station's thirty minute newscast. However, "(t)he two Republican candidates for governor sat side by side and spent half an hour calling each other names and exchanging accusations" (Nichols, April 13, 1990). This mini-debate highlighted the issues to be discussed three days later in Fayetteville. The two major issues of discussion were Tommy Robinson's personal finances and the Arkla-Arkoma deal. Robinson had been portrayed by Nelson as being "technically bankrupt" during the first unofficial debate. Robinson, not losing any chances to throw a few punches, stated that Nelson had "ripped the people of this state off and you [Nelson] know it" (Nichols, April 13, 1990).

The Plot

Both of the men involved in the debate in Fayetteville followed a storyline, whether consciously or unconsciously. Each portrayed himself as being involved within a story and viewed this storyline as how he would deal with the future of the state

of Arkansas. Tommy Robinson followed the theme portrayed in a series of movies, Walking Tall -- produced in the 1970's. The main character of these films was a Southern sheriff, called Buford Pusser. Pusser was a man who was not afraid of taking controversial actions, walking around with a big stick and beating in the windshields of criminals and evildoers. This quasi-combative attitude was shown in a slogan from one of Robinson's television ads where Robinson was depicted as "fighting for Arkansas" (Farris, April 14, 1990). In the debate, Robinson emphasized his years in public service and his tough stance on crime in the state. Robinson essentially portrayed himself as a "good ole' boy." Although Robinson had changed political affiliations within the year previous to the governor's race, he had not changed his basic storyline enough to resonate with the new constituency the party forced upon him.

Nelson, however, followed a contrasting narrative. Nelson's storyline pictured himself as being Arkansas' answer to Lee Iacocca, chairman of the Chrysler Corporation. Iacocca has emphasized his immigrant roots, tying himself to the myth of the 'melting pot' image of America. Nelson preached sections of the same 'sermon,' changing it to fit the characteristics of Arkansas. In his closing statement, Nelson emphasized that he came from a poor background and had to deal with having no water or electricity in his home as a child. Also, Nelson emphasized the successful nature of the business he managed, Arkla. This lead the critic to draw numerous similarities between the two chief executive officers and their companies.

Candidates' Stories And The Debate

Any study of a debate requires some statement about methodology.[2] As a result of a coin toss at the debate, the first question went to Sheffield Nelson. Following the Lee Iacocca metaphor, the question dealt with the compensation Nelson received as CEO of Arkla. The matter of Nelson's finances was especially important due to Robinson's promotion of the issue, and the image Robinson was attempting to create of a utility chief who gouged the taxpayers, lining his own pockets with money from poor Arkansans' wallets. Robinson had been quoted in statements before the debate as "promis(ing) to talk about you making so much money at Arkla that your pants fell down" (**Transcript**, 1990, p. 1) so the first question dealt with Nelson's salary while at Arkla.

Nelson responded in the manner any successful chief executive would respond -- proudly. He responded to questioner Bill Simmons that his total salary for the term he spent at Arkla was 7.7 million dollars. Nelson related that the bulk of the money was made from stock options on Arkla stock. Then Nelson went into an elaborate defense of his compensation, keeping with the Iacocca image, explaining that the stock options had been paid for by the stock owners and not the ratepayers. "(W)ith stockholder approval, on each stock option that was granted me, the stockholders paid all that money at no expense to the ratepayers of the state of Arkansas" (**Transcript**, 1990, p. 2). Nelson, in his answer, kept to the storyline that he was trying to project -

a successful businessman who did not gouge `Joe Public' and who was very modest about his gains.

The first question directed to Robinson was about teacher salaries, a volatile issue in Arkansas. Robinson had been recorded as stating that he would give public school teachers a raise without a tax increase by using the states natural growth funding (**Transcript**, 1990, p. 3). Robinson was asked, in agreement with these sentiments, if he would also raise salaries for other state employees. This question was a very policy-oriented question, one dealing with financial matters. Due to very large campaign debts Robinson had amassed in past campaigns for Congress, he did not have a very credible past with Arkansans about financial matters.

Partially due to this lack of credibility, Robinson's answer did not agree with the metaphor that he had attempted to portray to the people of Arkansas. Tommy Robinson had built his statewide reputation on being an action-oriented person, a Buford Pusser type. The response given was not a very `action' oriented response. Robinson stated that he was going to create a new category of state funding and give 80 percent of the funds to education. In his answer, Robinson also gave the first response that contradicted the resonance he had attempted to create with the voters of Arkansas. "I have a very good research team that I have put together - people very knowledgeable. As far as crunching out numbers, looking at positions, looking at what their job functions are, what the role of the agency is . . ." (**Transcript**, 1990, p. 3-4). This answer was the first of many in which Robin-

son gave an impression that he was in less than total control of his campaign.

The second question to Nelson continued to allow him to follow his **Lee Iacocca** storyline. Nelson was asked to explain to "us" what went wrong with the Arkoma deal. The Arkoma deal was a business partnership between Nelson, as the chairman of Arkla, and long-time associate Jerry Jones, owner of the **Dallas Cowboys** and an oil and gas drilling firm based in Oklahoma. Robinson, in his public statements before the debate, had attempted to make the deal appear as a "sweetheart deal between Nelson and Jones" (Reed, May 3, 1990). The Arkoma controversy dealt with the sale of natural gas leases controlled by Arkla to the Arkoma Production Company, owned by Jones. Following the entry of Nelson into the gubernatorial race, the Public Service Commission of Arkansas investigated whether the sale of these natural gas leases to the company owned by Jones caused Arkla ratepayers' bills to rise. Nelson, in his answer to the question dealing with the Arkoma controversy, stated that he felt that "absolutely nothing went wrong with the Arkhoma deal" (**Transcript**, 1990, p. 4). Nelson described the financial details of the dealings with Jones in the purchase and repurchase of the gas leases. The bulk of the answer was devoted to the somewhat complicated financial interrelationships between the two companies and its result. Nelson finished his answer by responding to his critics that the sale of the leases had caused rate hikes. He stated that the major problem of the controversy, apparently to his campaign, dealt with the impression that people did not understand the issue

(**Transcript**, 1990, p. 4). Nelson, who had appealed to the higher powers of the Federal Court system and the Public Service Commission, stated that both had cleared him of any wrongdoing. In this answer, Nelson reinforced the earlier continuity of his storyline he had established in the first stages of his campaign. Nelson stayed true to the ideas of Lee Iacocca by spending the bulk of his answer on an explanation of complicated financial dealings and then stating that the issue was so complex that people did not understand it. This helped keep Nelson within the boundaries of his plot and storyline.

Robinson's second question dealt with his personal finances, specifically, a bank loan that was granted him from a bank and trust company in Jackson County, Missouri. The reason given for the loan was for operation of a family farm operated by the Robinsons. Robinson's finances dominated discussion surrounding his campaigns since he initially ran for Arkansas' Second District seat in the House of Representatives in 1984.

In his answer, Robinson strayed from his ideal plot of the `Buford Pusser' storyline. Robinson tried to defend his use of the bank loan by equating himself with farmers, a large portion of the voters in the state (**Transcript**, 1990, p. 5). For approximately half of his one minute answer, Robinson detailed how complex his farming operation was. This portion of his answer was very good if Robinson was trying to establish himself in the eyes of Arkansas voters as a gentleman farmer, but he told a competing story with the idea of his `Buford Pusser' ideal. Robinson `concluded' his answer by saying that he felt good about the farm and attempted to draw upon the legitimacy of the insti-

tution of the bank in eastern Arkansas, transferring that legitimacy in some way to himself.

Nelson, in his response to the question asked Robinson, seized the chance to attack. The legitimacy Robinson had borrowed from the institution of the bank in Arkansas was very fragile. Nelson attempted to change the legitimacy Robinson had acquired back to the bank as social institution. Nelson stayed within the boundaries of his 'Lee Iacocca' storyline by comparing the relative values of the farmland in the areas. Nelson made sure that the Arkansas farmers knew that he was one of them as well, but did not go outside of the "CEO" storyline by stating that

> an insurance company that loaned me my money would not loan me but 70 percent of $600 an acre or $420 an acre. That's all that they would allow me -- with my financial statement. My point is, that it's a very high valued loan in terms of the percentages, because it's a 160% of market value. And also, he borrowed a 100% of the cost of farming, which is simply not normal banking procedure for loans to farms (**Transcript**, 1990, 6).

Nelson was then asked if he felt that the process of desegregation in Arkansas was working. On the surface this was a simple question. Actually, many significant events of Arkansas history deal with desegregation problems, from the crisis at Central High School in Little Rock in the 1950's to the current desegregation battle in the Little Rock metropolitan area, now entering its second decade. Nelson followed his CEO metaphor by

proposing a plan of action to deal with the constant specter of desegregation that has haunted the state.

> I propose we go forward with what we have today, which is the closest thing to neighborhood schools I think we will see. I would also say, if I were governor, I would have gotten involved long ago. I would have been involved five or six years ago to have tried to mitigate the damages that we've suffered (**Transcript**, 1990, 6).

At the end of this answer, Nelson described his 'corporate' plan of action for dealing with the desegregation problems of Arkansas in a phrase that sounds suspiciously like a tag line for a commercial -- "making school as easy as we can make it in terms of access, making it the best we can in terms of quality" (**Transcript**, 1990, 7).

In a question that dealt with the most sacred of sacred cows in Arkansas, the University of Arkansas system, Robinson was asked if he would break the system up if he were Governor. In a follow-up question, Robinson was asked how the break-up of the U of A system would help higher education throughout the state. In his answer, Robinson ran as fast as possible away from the story he had projected before the debate of the decisive sheriff.

> I don't know what I am going to do about it. I am going to look at it... I mean, we've got some real problems in higher education... I'm going to look at it. I have an education task force that is addressing that issue right now and they are supposed to report back to me within 3 weeks. And I'm going to see what

they have to say about it (**Transcript**, 1990, 7-8).

In his closing statement, Nelson continued to portray himself with the guidelines of the CEO with the poor, unprivileged background. "I came out of a very poor childhood, in Monroe County. I lived on a farm with no water, no electricity, no gas. Uh, my family was very poor. We did without food at times" (**Transcript**, 1990, 25). This was the Arkansas version of the immigrant to the United States. Nelson continued the use of the 'Lee Iacocca' metaphor by highlighting his record while at Arkla Gas. "During my twelve years there I took that company to be recognized to be one of the very best in the industry. I personally was selected as the top chief executive officer in the entire industry. I feel that my record speaks for itself, and the money that I made there was earned" (**Transcript**, 1990, 24).

Then Nelson attempted to position the choices before the voters of Arkansas as one of "the person who will be your chief executive officer of your 2 billion dollar business for the next four years" (**Transcript**, 1990, 24). Nelson asked the audience of the debate to compare the two records of the candidates. Nelson, in his talk, attempted to force the voters of Arkansas into a polarizing situation in dealing with choices for the governorship. Nelson placed the choices as being between a former chief executive officer of a major company who many Arkansans had benefited from, and a former sheriff who had caused much controversy and had accomplished very little while as a Congressman.

In Tommy Robinson's closing statement, he first responded to the charges which had been detailed against him by Nelson about

his inaction while in Congress, then thanked the sponsors of the debate, and launched into a narrative which attempted to justify his running for Governor. Robinson, in this mini-narrative, tried to tell the state of Arkansas, like his family, the reasons he wanted to run for Governor. This narrative stands in direct contrast to the 'Buford Pusser' narrative Robinson attempted to position himself as following before the debate. He attempted to paint a verbal picture by drawing himself as Robert Young in **Father Knows Best**. He tried to paint his closing statement as an appeal from one family to another. Robinson placed four issues in his campaign; (1) education, (2) jobs, (3) crime, and (4) improving the efficiency of the state government. In his final remarks, he seemed to run more against the incumbent than the opponent in the primary. Bill Clinton was mentioned twice and Sheffield Nelson wasn't mentioned once -- by name.

Clinton was portrayed as an ultimate devil in the story told by Robinson. "(E)ven the Eastern Europeans have learned this lesson. When you have one party, one man rule, you get government inefficiencies, government stagnation, and many cases, outright dishonesty" (**Transcript**, 1990, 26). Robinson compared the mostly Republican administration in Arkansas' sister state, Missouri and her roads program, with that of Arkansas. Robinson, even though he had previously been a part of the state's Democratic administration, seemed to run harder against the Democratic incumbent than his Republican opponent.

The Candidates' Roles And The Debate

In Hart's (1990) method of role analysis there are four categories: **emotional/moral action**, **narrative action**, **behavioral**

action, and **performative action** (p. 296-298). The role projected by each candidate in the debate will be analyzed according to this method. Each of the candidates I-statements or self-references has been calculated and is listed in Table 1. Sheffield Nelson had a total of 188 statements that made some reference to himself in the debate. Nelson's largest category was **performative action**, which Hart (1990) characterizes as "references to the speaker's intentions for the speech or to commitments and certifications being made by the fact of the speech itself" (p. 298). Nelson had 68 of these statements. This is only natural, because Nelson stuck to his storyline of `Lee Iacocca' and established himself as a man of action. A man of action is not only expected to say what he has done but what he will do as well.

The second largest category of Nelson's self-references is that of **narrative action**. Hart (1990) defines **narrative action** as "references to allegedly factual events, sometimes occurring in the distant past, that led up to the speech" (296). Nelson's statements of narrative action were dealing with either his years as president of Arkla gas or with the service Nelson had accomplished to the state. In this category, Nelson maintained narrative fidelity -- the story he told did not conflict with the story the audience already knew about him.

The third category is **behavioral action**. **Behavioral action(s)** are "specific policy behaviors that the speaker has engaged in immediately prior to the speech event itself" (Hart,

1990, 296-298). This category envelops Nelson's experiences while campaigning around Arkansas.

The smallest category of I-statements or self-references for Nelson is that of **emotional/moral** action. Hart (1990) defined this category as "the speaker's reports of feelings experienced, moral lessons learned, and hopes and desires for the future" (p. 296). The bulk of Nelson's statements in this category are noncommittal statements which very few, if any Arkansans would have problems agreeing with. Many of the statements are statements of Nelson's opinions. In many of these statements, Nelson clearly expresses what he feels should be done in considering of policy ideas for the state government.

Robinson used an entirely different ratio of I-statments in his section of the debate. His largest category of statements was that of **narrative events**. Robinson had 92 self-references. Tommy Robinson was an excellent storyteller. The problem he experienced in regards to the debate and his campaign for Governor was the stories he told did not fit with the stories Arkansans already knew about him. Robinson tried to maintain a storyline of the "true and honest" law enforcement officer who had served his public well and was now attempting to serve the public on a wider scale. However, the bulk of Robinson's I-statements were in response to either Nelson or the questioners placing Robinson on the defensive. If a person is forced into a response to the stories being forced on him/herself it is very difficult for that person to advance the storyline they prefer. By responding to Nelson's attacks, and questions which placed him on the defensive, Robinson's storyline was rendered ineffective. Most

of the statements classified under the **narrative action** category were Robinson's attempt to maintain his storyline in defense of himself.

The second largest category for Tommy Robinson is that of **performative action**. In the statements which Arkansas voters would be expecting Robinson to say what he would do in regards to governmental policy, he only made clear statements about his future state policy in regards to the Arkansas State Police. Robinson made many statements in the debate that showed he did not know what to do about particular issues. Voters expected to hear a candidate say what will be done, not that he/she does not know what to do.

Robinson's third category was **emotional/moral action**. Many of the statements that were placed into this category were very emotional responses to perceived attacks on Tommy Robinson's character. The smallest category of Robinson's I-Statements was that of **behavioral action**. Reflecting specific policy behaviors that he had undertaken immediately prior to the debate, most of his statements of **behavioral action** dealt with his record while serving the Second District of Arkansas. Robinson made more than three times as many self-references in the narrative category than he did about specific policies that he had engaged in before the debate.

CONCLUSION

In the debate, the two candidates used elements of narrative rationality and placement of role within a rhetorical context. The Arkansas Debate should be viewed as political theater, not as

a forensic contest. Sheffield Nelson was able to play the successful CEO, Arkansas' answer to Lee Iacocca, throughout the length of the Republican primary. He was able to control the debate, not just that day in Fayetteville, but each day of the campaign.

Viewing debates through the lens of political theater, the voters of Arkansas must have had a difficult time deciding what role Tommy Robinson was playing. Robinson entered the debate playing the role of `Buford Pusser,' a tough talking sheriff who was hard on crime and who would treat the state government the same way. In the debate, Robinson switched between many characters. In the answer to one question he was a gentleman farmer. For another, he was Robert Young from **Father Knows Best**. Robinson simply attempted to portray himself as fitting into too many roles. Instead of appearing to the voters watching the debate as Buford Pusser in the **Walking Tall** movie series, Robinson came off looking more like Barney Fife of **The Andy Griffith Show**.

One of the major sections of Fisher's narrative paradigm is the idea of narrative rationality. Central to narrative rationality is the idea of coherence. If the story that a candidate tells is not coherent, if the role he or she projects for themselves does not resonate with the expectations that the voters have for the position being decided, then the candidate will not be elected.

The portrayal of role by each candidate helps reinforce the views of each candidates' own portrayal of the role offered to the Arkansas voters. Nelson, in managing to concentrate his self-references in the behavioral category, was able to provide

Arkansas voters a consistent picture of his plans for the future of the state. Robinson was forced to spend the bulk of his self-references in answering the charges of his critics. With most of his statements in the category of narrative action, Robinson was not able to promote his vision of the future of the state. If a candidate only spends time in a debate such as this in defense of past actions, then the chances the candidate will have a positive influence on voters is extremely small.

This debate, in all probability, was a turning point for both the Democratic and Republican candidates for the governorship. It certainly had a major influence on the future of the Republican party in Arkansas. The voters of Arkansas, at least partially because of their experience of the narrative rationality of Nelson, voted for Sheffield Nelson to meet Governor Bill Clinton in the November general elections. The vote total was 47,751 for Sheffield Nelson and 39,624 for Tommy Robinson (Reed, May 31, 1990). Bill Clinton would go on to meet Sheffield Nelson in the November elections and be reelected for another four years. There will certainly be more statewide debates between candidates for constitutional offices in Arkansas primary elections. This, however, was the first.

Table 1
Comparative Use of I - Statements

Item	Nelson	Robinson	Nixon Checkers Speech
General Information			
No. of words	4240	4779	4606
No. of I-Statements	188	219	189
Words/I-Statement ratio	22.6	21.8	26.7
Types I-Statements %			
Emotional/Moral	18.1	16.9	26.3
Narrative	23.4	42	22.5
Performative	22.3	12.8	27.5
Behavioral	36.2	28.3	23.8

The figures from the Nixon Checkers Speech are taken from Hart, R.P. Modern Rhetorical Criticism. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown Higher Education, 1990 page 300) and are intended only to serve as a comparison.

NOTES

[1] The first debate broadcast for statewide audiences in the race for Governor occurred October 11, 1968 between Republican Governor Winthrop Rockefeller and his Democratic Challenger Marion H. Crank. The hour long debate was the first ever broadcast on all six television stations in the state simultaneously. For more information see;

Douthit, G. (1968, October 12). "WR-Crank `Debate' Mild Affair." Arkansas Democrat, 1A.

"First Rockefeller-Crank Debate at 6:30 Tonight." (1968, October 11). Arkansas Democrat. 1A.

Lewis, B. (1968, October 12). "WR, Crank Find Little to Agree on in Debate." Arkansas Gazette, 3A

"WR and Crank Open Debates on 6 Stations." (1968, October 11), Arkansas Gazette. 1B.

[2] For a few examples of excellent analyses of this view of a debate see:

Bitzer, L. & Rueter, T. (1980). Carter vs. Ford: The Counterfeit Debates of 1976. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Jamieson, K.H. & Birdsell, D.S. (1988). Presidential Debates. New York: Oxford UP.

Kraus, S. (1962). The Great Debates: Kennedy vs. Nixon, 1960. Bloomington: Indiana UP.

[3] To acquire a text for analysis, I requested a videotape copy of the debate as broadcast over the Arkansas Educational Television Network. After receiving the tape, I made an audio-

tape copy of the debate, which I used to compile a transcript. After compiling the transcript, I applied certain critical methods as detailed earlier. Unless otherwise cited, all references to comments made or direct quotations from either candidate come from this transcript. Copies of this transcript are available directly from the author.

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